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Dear Guy

Upgrading the M4 to a smart motorway: road users' views

Following publication of the above report, we wanted to write to you to let you know what we're doing on the back of your recommendations.

Since we met at the M4 site office on 16th May, the team have continued to develop our detailed action plan and we'd like to share some of the positive interventions that the project has begun to introduce, and what we're doing next.

Recommendation one: Awareness of the M4 smart motorway upgrade work is at an encouraging level but there is scope to do more to ensure individual drivers are made aware of the project and its benefits, particularly those living some distance from the stretch of road concerned and/or who use it infrequently.

We've undertaken information events throughout the summer, using a much wider range of venues. In addition to motorways service areas, events are being held at various business parks, supermarkets and in and around Heathrow airport. During these events people are being asked whether they would like to sign up to receive further direct communications.

The team meet with Legoland regularly to update them on our works programme and to explore how we can work together on communication and promotion. We're consulting with the Local Enterprise Partnerships on an ongoing basis to help them meet their objectives, and Mike Grant – the project director - has been invited to speak about economic growth at the Berkshire & Thames Valley Development Plan event in September.

And of course we'll continue to make letter drops to local residents, community centres and schools.

Recommendation two: Road users are keen to receive information about the work through a wide variety of channels including roadside signage, news media, mapping tools and apps as well as social media, information at motorway service areas (MSAs) and, for businesses, direct contact with Highways England. In exploring all of these, Highways England should note users' particular interest in receiving

information via satellite navigation systems and from the likes of Google Maps and Waze.

In addition to what's outlined above, we're installing extra scheme billboards after each junction. This will display the reasons and timescales for the work wherever road users join the M4.

More Travel Time Variable Message Signs have already been installed along and around the scheme. We're also very keen to utilise the electronic billboards used on the A14 and we're working on the details currently.

Lee Rowbotham shared the A66 publication on their use of text messaging with us and we're exploring this further with that team. Likewise, the possibility of using WAZE is being looked at.

A stakeholder forum is being planned to start this month. All key stakeholders will have a monthly standing invitation to the project office to hear scheme progress and news at the same time.

Recommendation three: Users are particularly concerned to get timely information about overnight and weekend closures (including any changes to previously published plans). Highways England should ensure such changes are communicated in good time – both ahead of the work and as drivers approach any temporary closure. In addition, more assistance could usefully be provided to drivers regarding alternative routes (and potentially alternative modes) available during disruption or closures.

An exercise has been carried out to determine specific freight/hauliers using the M4, by means of CCTV camera footage. The project team have also approached the Freight Transport Association to help with this.

We're considering different formats to publicise diversion route information, so that it's easily accessible to all road users.

Recommendation four: Transport Focus notes a substantial degree of misunderstanding about the operation of smart motorways and a belief among many drivers that hard shoulder running will be implemented only at peak times. There is also considerable concern about not having a hard shoulder, both in case of breakdowns but also for the ability of emergency services to access incidents. Providing more details about the operation of smart motorways – and on the M4 in particular – may help to overcome these issues, along with statistics that demonstrate the safety of smart motorways already in operation.

On 24 June we launched a brand new national campaign to educate the public on how to use our motorways. The campaign will run over six weeks and focus on four main themes:

- Red X
- Variable speed limits
- What to do in a breakdown
- The importance of keeping left, no matter how many lanes the motorway has

Hopefully you'll spot our adverts on the radio, at motorway service stations and across the corporate social media channels.

To help promote our key messages we've created an [official campaign website](http://www.highwaysengland.co.uk/motorways) – (www.highwaysengland.co.uk/motorways) which includes relevant advice and

information based around these four themes. There'll also be live radio broadcast media activity across RCCs – so do listen out for coverage.

As part of the campaign we've also been working with organisations that represent disabled drivers and vulnerable users. From this we've captured a short film sharing the perspective and advice from one disabled motorist about using our network and what to do in a breakdown situation.

The M4 team will use these campaign materials at all their events. They're also developing localised communications using the detailed geographical insight of the M4 research, to deliver area specific messages about the scheme and it's benefits to all users.

Recommendation five: Having established benchmark levels of awareness of and attitudes towards the smart motorway upgrade and the works required to achieve it, Highways England is encouraged to work with Transport Focus to conduct further waves of research and to monitor changes in road users' awareness and understanding.

We would like to work with you on this in early in 2020 and we'll be in touch to agree next steps for this piece of work.

We hope this letter explains how your recommendations are shaping our thinking and how we're responding to road user feedback provided as a result of the research. We've very much welcomed this opportunity to work with you and your team, and look forward to continuing our partnership to enhance the customer experience throughout the upgrade.

Yours sincerely

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